

LOS ANGELES HERALD-EXAMINER (CA)

24 October 1980

# Did Mondale back reported counterspy for Senate panel?

By John P. Wallach

Herald Examiner foreign affairs editor

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department is investigating reports that Vice President Walter Mondale wrote a personal letter recommending David Barnett, the alleged former CIA covert agent-turned-Soviet counterspy, for a high-level job with the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.

The investigation is being conducted on the basis of reports received by the Justice Department from congressional sources.

Vice President Mondale's press secretary, Albert Eisele, described the reports as "totally untrue."

"The vice president never met the man and has no recollection of having written a letter for him to anyone," Eisele said. "A search of our files shows no record of any such letter."

Justice Department sources disclosed that they have repeatedly quizzed Intelligence Committee staffers about the purported Mondale letter, apparently written in late 1976 or early 1977, but have not been able to confirm its existence.

If Mondale did write on his behalf, the letter would have been sent to the committee at a time when Barnett was on the payroll of the KGB, the super-secret Soviet intelligence agency, which reportedly paid him more than \$100,000 for information on U.S. weaponry and covert CIA operations.

Barnett has agreed to plead guilty or no contest to the charge he was a Soviet spy if a federal grand jury

in Baltimore indicts him today, according to wire service reports.

"We know that a number of letters were written on Mr. Barnett's behalf by a rather impressive group of political friends of his but so far at least we have not been able to lay our hands on a Mondale letter," a federal law enforcement official said.

He refused to rule out the possibility that a Mondale letter may have been removed or otherwise disappeared from the Senate committee's files.

Even if it does or did exist however, it apparently had no impact because Barnett's application, according to committee staff director William G. Miller, was "filed along with hundreds of others and he was never seriously considered for employment."

The Justice Department also was said to be investigating reports that Barnett used his political influence in an unsuccessful effort to land two other key jobs.

One was with the House Intelligence Committee and the other with the Intelligence Oversight Board, a three-member panel created during the Ford administration to hear allegations of wrongdoing by intelligence agencies.

Several Justice Department officials believe the detection of Barnett's activities mark the deepest confirmed penetration by the KGB of the CIA. Other officials are more skeptical of Barnett's importance to the Russians.

The New York Times reported yesterday that Barnett admitted his association with the KGB when

federal law enforcement officials confronted him.

But other sources told the Herald Examiner that the CIA is not anxious to prosecute Barnett because it is believed he can be "turned around" to become a double agent under the agency's control. Presumably Barnett has learned something about KGB operations that could be helpful, this source explained.

Barnett left the CIA in 1970 to start his own intelligence-related concern, but did part-time contract work for the agency in 1978 and 1979. Officials familiar with the investigation said it was during this latter period that he came under suspicion.

An FBI investigation reportedly was launched in early 1978 — about six months after Barnett had applied for the House intelligence committee and Intelligence Oversight Board positions — and has continued for the past two years.